

# Editor's Foreword: Confucianism and Education

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Since Immanuel Kant's seminal essay "What is Enlightenment?", independent, autonomous and critical thinking has stood at the forefront of any "progressive" (and even any reasonable) theory of education. In today's neo-liberal and globalized world, the common trend of making everything a marketable commodity has also affected this, notwithstanding the fact that the ability to establish one's critical and independent judgement remains the very basis of becoming an autonomous individual, and represents a central pillar of democracy. As such, critical thinking has become a product that can be bought, sold or even stolen—just like its traditional breeding ground, namely institutionalized education. It may thus be time to mourn the loss of the critical mind, and so mark the sad end of a certain kind of education, one which gave a key place to the humanities.

However, instead of grieving for such losses and memorializing the end of the European subject, who has obviously lost his free will in the whirlwind of the all-embracing market economy, and sadly died in front of the barbed-wire fences defending his homeland from thousands of unarmed, weakened, starving and freezing refugees, we are searching for alternatives.

As such, we present in this issue another kind of education. Admittedly, the values Confucian education aimed to foster did not include much absolute independence, but it still laid emphasis on autonomous critical thinking and genuine humaneness. While many believe that Confucianism is incompatible with the critical mind and personal autonomy, this issue aims to show that this wide-spread prejudice is rooted in a lack of knowledge. The most common image of Confucianism is that it was advocating a strict, rigid and hierarchically structured society based on the absolute obedience of those at the subordinate levels of the system, and, analogously, on absolute power of their superiors. However, we would like to present another picture of Confucian education, one that is more academically justified and closer to the truth. It is important to recall that this model was originally, and especially in the classical Confucian teachings, rooted in the principles of complementarity and reciprocal responsibility. Moreover, while the autocratic model of hierarchy, by which

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the ruler's authority was absolute and their responsibility towards their subordinates reduced to a mere formalism or symbolism, has undeniably held sway in Chinese history, we must also bear in mind that Confucianism in its role as the state doctrine represented the interests of the ruling class, and as such was defined by legalistic elements that are not found in original Confucianism. We must not forget that hierarchic structures are also present in Western democratic systems, and most importantly, authority based on experience, knowledge and abilities is not necessarily a negative ideal, or a threat to individual autonomy.

The Confucian classics stress the important role of ideational and axiological elements, like rituality, relational ethics, the virtues of humaneness and justice, and the crucial role of education as a basic means of cultivating and thus improving (inborn) humaneness in order to achieve progress and social development. While they also lay stress on the so-called "Six Arts"—ritual, music, archery, chariot-riding, calligraphy, and computation—it is clear that the Confucian classics see morality as the most important subject. Confucian didactic methods are rather remarkable. Like Confucius, a Confucian teacher never lectures at length on a subject. Instead, he or she poses questions, quotes passages from the classical works, or applies fitting analogies, and then waits for the students to find the right answers "independently"—by themselves.

According to the *Analects*, Confucius pointed out that thinking without learning is blind, and learning without thinking dangerous. Besides, he also asserted that attacking the views of others is harmful. This tolerance is based on a notion of moral autonomy, which is typical for the Confucian ideal personality, and implicit in most of the Confucian discourses. As such, promoting education is one of the most important Confucian values, and it is better to educate one's children than to give them wealth. However, education is not only the wealth of a person, but also that of the cultures and societies he or she lives within. It is the most valuable inheritance we can give future generations. Moreover, in today's globalized world, in which different traditions can interact and learn from each other, this kind of inheritance can be exchanged, combined, synthesized and thus enriched. Therefore, this special issue wishes to present different approaches to achieving and preserving this, in the West, at least, hidden treasure. It also aims to raise awareness regarding a particular, culturally and historically conditioned model of institutions, didactic structures and axiological priorities, which differs profoundly from traditional Euro-American educational models.

This special issue is structured around three broad themes. The first is linked to the *Contemporary Implications* of Confucian Education, and includes two contributions, written by Kirill O. Thompson and Jana S. Rošker, respectively. It opens with

Thompson's article, entitled "Lessons from Zhu Xi's Views on Inquiry and Learning for Contemporary Advanced Humanities Education and Research". This paper deals with important questions regarding the crisis of contemporary humanities, the sense, purpose and function of which seem to be gradually getting lost in our globalized world. Because of widescale social transitions, which inevitably also influence education at all levels, formal schooling is increasingly often reduced to just the training of efficient professional experts, without considering that every society also needs responsible, thoughtful and cultivated people. As a meaningful alternative, the author introduces Zhu Xi's model of "advanced learning", which is comparable to the contemporary college education and not only provides students with the necessary factual knowledge about society and the world, but also cultivates them in order to develop their sensibility, logic and abilities of autonomous judgement. The author shows that Zhu Xi's educational theories imply the importance of such cultivation, which is a necessary and elementary part of every sensitive, responsible, reflective and self-aware human being. Jana S. Rošker, the author of the second article on this broad theme, writes about "Contemporary Confucianism as a Form of East Asian Social Knowledge", and likewise grounds her contribution in the problematic global tendencies seen in contemporary education. Proceeding from the notion of Confucianism as a form of social knowledge in East Asia, she aims to explain why and how the Modern Confucian emphasis on the traditional Confucian link between comprehension and the ethical evaluation of being is of great importance for a gradual restoration of the "credibility" of ancient Chinese thought in the context of modern social knowledge.

The second theme, entitled *Body and Mind*, proceeds from the introduction of the corporeal aspects of Confucian teachings, through the tacit knowledge implied in their explicit and implicit epistemological methods, and then directly to its linkages to ideologies. It opens with Margus Ott's article "Confucius' Embodied Knowledge". In this the author argues that the modern embodiment theory could help us to understand some critical aspects of Confucianism and the Confucian theory of knowledge, and vice versa. Through a systematic analysis of classical sources, Ott shows that—in contrast to Western ideational history—China in general and Confucianism in particular has a very long tradition of embodied knowledge and embodied cognition. David Bartosch's paper, "Explicit and Implicit Aspects of Confucian Education", investigates Confucian methods of manifest and latent knowledge in order to identify possible approaches for their adaptation, modernization and their fruitful synthesis with modern educational science. The last paper in this set was written by Selusi Ambrogio, and deals with another kind of latent knowledge, investigating the process of (often hidden) forms of ideologically guided misuse of Confucian teachings, and the related teachings of moral education in contemporary

China. This article is entitled “Moral Education and Ideology: The Revival of Confucian Values and the Harmonious Shaping of the New Chinese Man”.

The last theme of this special issue deals with Confucian education in the broader geopolitical context of Eastern and South-East Asia, and thus in different regions belonging to the area that was historically influenced by Confucian teachings. As such, its title is *Broader Perspectives*, and it contains three contributions. The first two were written by Marko Ogrizek and Kristina Hmeljak Sangawa. They both explore certain transformations and the fate of Confucian teachings in pre-modern Japan. Ogrizek's article, “Following the Way of the Ancient Kings: The Concept of ‘Learning’ in the Teachings of Ogyū Sorai”, introduces Sorai's concept of learning, which is based on studying “the Way of the ancient Kings”. Since Ogyū Sorai is among the most famous and influential Japanese Confucian philosophers of the Edo period, his teachings had wide ranging implications both for the educational and the political system of pre-modern Japan. In order to gain an insight into the ethical and political consequences of Sorai's interpretations, the author demonstrates how and why he was basing his interpretation of value and meaning, as prescribed by the ancient sages, chiefly on the reverence of the unknowable, and his concept of following the Way mainly on faith in the sages. Kristina Hmeljak-Sangawa's paper also deals with the problem of Confucian teachings and education in pre-modern Japan, although from quite a different perspective. In her article entitled “Confucian Learning and Literacy in Japan's Schools of the Edo Period”, she investigates the social functions and implications of Chinese Confucian teachings that were written in the kanbun style, on the development of the Japanese educational system and strategies of literacy. Last, but not least, we have to introduce the article “A Vietnamese Reading of the Master's Classic: Phạm Ngọcễn Du's *Humble Comments on the Analects* as an Example of Transformative Learning”, which was written by the Vietnamese scholar Nam Nguyen. It offers a remarkable insight into an area, which is still widely unknown in Western scholarship, namely the Vietnamese reception and re-interpretation of Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism.

We hope that this diverse issue, which illuminates Confucian teachings and views on education from several different perspectives, will help readers to obtain a better understanding of this important element of ancient and traditional East Asian cultural heritage. It is an especially valuable heritage, which can—*inter alia*—enable us to understand that education is much more than a few years of training in professional expertise. It is a lifelong process, because learning to be truly human is a never-ending project.

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